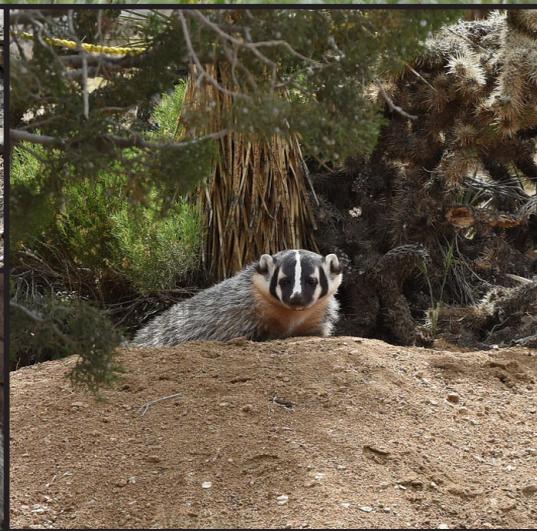


UC SANTA CRUZ CAMPUS NATURAL RESERVE

# AMERICAN BADGER



Zane Hiatt

**Scientific Name:** *Taxidea taxus*  
**Common Name:** American Badger  
**Global Rarity:** Secure  
**State Rarity:** CA Species of Special Concern; Vulnerable  
**UCSC Rarity:** Extirpated; occasional itinerant use



## General Description

The American badger is found throughout the United States west of the Mississippi River. They can be about three feet long and weigh up to 15 pounds. They are gray and brown with white and black stripes on their faces. Their main habitat is dry grasslands but they can live in many different environments. Badgers are solitary and nocturnal animals that excel at digging. They are carnivores and will eat any small animals but prefer gophers, squirrels, and voles. They dig extensive burrow systems.



## Identification

**Length:** 30 to 35 inches  
**Weight:** 12 to 16 pounds  
**General Color:** Grizzled gray and black above, with buff colored sides and distinctive black and white facial markings, buff/tan underbellies, black legs and feet.

## Geographic Range and Seasonal Movements

The American badger is found in the western, eastern and central United States west of the Mississippi River, northern Mexico, and south central Canada. Badgers are non migratory so they do not move seasonally. Their home ranges are smaller in the winter than the summer. Males have larger home ranges than females and can wander extensively throughout broad territories. California range shown at right.





## UCSC Distribution

Badgers bred on the UCSC campus until the late 1980s. In recent years, extensive feeding digs have been observed in lower campus grasslands on three occasions.

## Life history

**Habitat:** Badgers prefer to live in dry, open grasslands. They can live at high elevations to sea level and have been found in semi-deserts, meadows, and open forests.

**Reproduction:** The badger mating season is late summer or early autumn but the embryos are arrested in early development and wait to be implanted until environmental conditions are right. The female badger is pregnant for 7 months but the gestation period is only 6 weeks. Litters of 1 to 5 offspring are born in early spring.

**Behavior:** Badgers are solitary and mainly active at night. They are not as active during the winter months but they do not hibernate, rather they go through cycles of torpor (inactivity). Badgers excel at digging and they can make underground burrows for protection and sleeping.

**Diet:** Badgers are carnivores and eat small animals such as gophers, squirrels, moles, mice, prairie dogs, insects, and birds.

## Research Highlights and Fun Facts

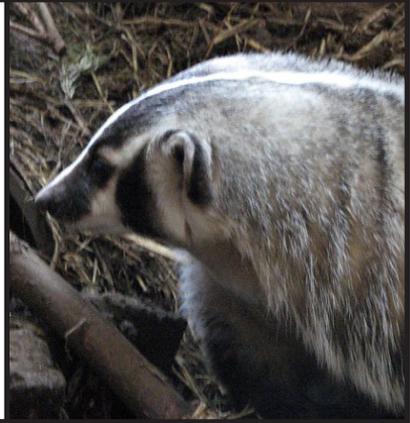
- Badgers have been known to have mutualistic relationships with coyotes, their natural predators, in which they hunt together.
- When threatened, badgers release a foul smelling scent to drive off predators as well as growl, squeal, and show their teeth.
- Badgers can live up to 30 years in captivity.
- Badgers have a second eyelid to protect their eyes from dirt while they are digging.
- Badger burrows only have one entrance and they are an immense network of tunnels that connect with each other.



## Conservation Status

### California Species of Special Concern

Though this species is not listed on a federal level in the United States, both subspecies found in Canada are listed as Endangered.



## Threats

### Statewide:

The American Badger is threatened across the state by:

1. Habitat loss and degradation from development and agriculture
2. Road impacts (killed while crossing roads)
3. Climate change impacts including an increase in invasive plant cover that affects prey distribution
4. Illegal depredation from landowners

### UCSC campus:

The extirpation of American Badgers from the UCSC campus in the late 1980s stemmed from habitat loss and possibly secondary poisoning from badgers consuming poisoned ground squirrels. UCSC no longer uses these chemicals, but development of lower campus grasslands may be a threat to recolonization. Regional habitat fragmentation and roads are also a threat, though many local grasslands are protected.

## Ways you can help

Advocate for the protection of lower campus grasslands. If you see large burrows with ~12" diameter, oval openings and large mounds of dirt in front of them on the UCSC campus, report your findings to the Campus Natural Reserve at [cnr@ucsc.edu](mailto:cnr@ucsc.edu). [EarthRanger.com](http://EarthRanger.com) helps to start fundraising campaigns that support environmental and conservation education. If you find an unwanted badger den on your property, contact a group that supports the protection and recovery of at-risk species that could come and safely remove the den as well as the badgers living in it.

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